

University of South Carolina Union

Act 629 – Summary Reports on Institutional Effectiveness

Fiscal Year 2003-2004

Definition:

Academic advising is a long-term relationship between student and advisor that provides students with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities for completion of their degrees, programs, and/or career preparation and that helps students reach their educational goals. It consists of regular discussions of those goals, consideration of alternatives available to the student, the planning of appropriate course work, the monitoring of student progress, and referral to other campus and University resources. At USCU, all full-time faculty and our Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs act as academic advisors. Students who declare an intention to pursue a particular baccalaureate major are assigned an appropriate advisor based on that major; undecided students are assigned an available advisor.

Given this system of advisement, it is important that all advisors be knowledgeable of all USC academic programs. With the help of the Vice Provost for Regional Campuses, the Associate Dean regularly distributes advisement materials from the colleges of USC Columbia and from the schools of USC Spartanburg. The Associate Dean also produces a local advisor's manual and leads periodic meetings devoted to advisement issues.

Indicators:

- Accuracy of advisement
 - a. Use of placement test results
 - b. Recognition of prerequisites
 - c. Progress toward academic goals
- Student satisfaction
- Alumni satisfaction
- Advisor satisfaction

Assessment Methods:

- Analysis of student academic records
- Student surveys
- Alumni surveys
- Advisor surveys
- Performance Indicators of Act 359

One of the outcomes of academic advisement is the selection of courses taken each semester. In a **transcript analysis**, we examine the transcript of each graduate and tabulate the courses taken in each of the four basic skills areas of writing, speech, mathematics, and computer science and in the liberal arts areas of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional areas such as business or nursing.

Various **surveys** are used to assess the quality of our academic advisement. Each spring, a sample of currently enrolled students are asked if they know who their advisors are and if they are satisfied with their availability. Every two years, as mandated by Act 255, we survey recent graduates in an effort to measure their satisfaction with their academic experiences at USCU. At three to five year intervals, a more comprehensive survey is distributed to students and alumni. We ask about goals that students had and the problems that they encountered. We measure student satisfaction with many features of the educational program, academic support services, and administrative support services at USCU. We measure the degree to which USCU helped students reach various academic and personal development goals. We measure the availability of advisors, their attitude toward students, their knowledge and helpfulness, and how assertive advisors are in organizing meetings with advisees. We ask about the value of placement testing and the availability of appropriate courses. Faculty advisors are surveyed on the same topics.

Among the **Performance Indicators** of Act 359, Indicator 2.E is related to effective advisement. Here, we assess the availability of advisors outside the classroom using the first survey mentioned above.

Assessment Results:

ADVISEMENT TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS

Placement Accuracy—During fall, 2003, we took a sample of 30 entering students who had taken our placement tests that year and who had then enrolled in one or more courses for the fall. We use English and math placement tests, and our question was, are students advised to enroll in the course indicated by the appropriate test? At the same time, we looked at our success in placing beginning students into UNIV 101, The Student in the University, a student success course that is very helpful for entering students. Finally, we looked for any other instances of inappropriate advisement.

Of the 30 students examined, 26 were placed appropriately in English, and 4 did not enroll in an English course that semester. Of the 30 students examined, 16 were placed appropriately in mathematics, and 14 did not enroll in a math course that semester. Of the 30 students, 14 (47%) enrolled in UNIV 101, 6 (20%) did not, and 10 (33%) were not beginning students or were part-time students and did not enroll in the course. In addition, 3 students enrolled in CSCE 101 in spite of having apparent weaknesses in math, and 1 student enrolled in CHEM 111 with that same math weakness. No other questions were found in this sample.

Graduate Analysis—In a second study, we asked, are we advising our students into well-rounded liberal arts programs of study? We tabulated a transcript analysis of a sample of our spring 2003 graduates (n=30). First, we recorded the highest course taken in each of the four areas of writing, oral communication, mathematics, and computer literacy. The courses we offer include ENGL 101 and 102, THSP 140, and various courses in MATH, STAT, and CSCE. Second, for the same students, we tabulated the number of courses taken, other than those listed above, in the major fields of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional areas, such as business or nursing.

As previous transcript analyses have shown, all of our students take writing, and most of our students take speech, math, and computer science (97% in each case), even though all are not required for our associate degrees. Advisors are encouraging students to take courses in these basic, SACS-recognized areas. Secondly, we have good balance in other liberal-arts areas. Only one or two natural science courses are required for the associate degree, but the average taken is 2.1. Between four and six each are taken in the humanities and the social sciences. The total hours earned at graduation is considerably lower than in previous years, only six more than the minimum required for graduation.

SPRING ADVISOR EVALUATION

Each spring, a representative sample of the student body is polled and asked three questions about their academic advisement. The sample ranges between 75 and 100 students. We average a 75% return rate. Below are the questions and the actual number of responses for the last six years.

1.

Check one response:	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	Mean
Yes, I know who my advisor is.	59	74	84	82	59	81	79	96%
No, I no <u>not</u> know who my advisor is.	0	7	2	7	4	0	0	4%

2. Please indicate your satisfaction with the availability of your academic advisor by choosing one response from the scale below. (In selecting your rating, consider the advisor's availability via established office hours, appointments, and other opportunities for face-to-face interaction as well as via telephone, e-mail, fax, and other means.)

1. Very
Dissatisfied

2. Dissatisfied

3. Satisfied

4. Very
Satisfied

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Satisfied or Very Satisfied	92%	85%	88%	97%	92%	94%

In this matter, we have always exceeded the state's Performance Funding standards.

3. If you are dissatisfied, what has been the problem? Be specific.

These comments indicate that advisors are sometimes hard to contact, that advisors are not always familiar with other degree programs at other colleges, and that advisors are sometimes passive and do not assertively contact students. Rarely, an advisor is described as impatient or not a good listener. One student asked for a course work sheet for each program, to make it easier to select the courses that are required in that program. Another needed more information about how academics affects financial aid.

WITHDRAWAL SURVEY

Each year, we ask those students who come into the Records Office to withdraw, change campus, or to get a request for transcript form to complete a Withdrawal Survey that asks, in part, the same question as above. This table gives the results for two years:

Year	n	Mean Score
2003	39	3.6
2004	26	3.6

One might expect that withdrawing students would constitute a biased sample of the student body, but on average, they are satisfied with the academic advisement that they have been getting.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING

In 1994, we began to use an additional item in our regular course evaluation form, and since then, we have periodically asked, "If you could change one thing about USC Union, its courses, activities, facilities, administration, what would it be? If you have answered this question in another class, please describe a second change that you would like to make." This question is not a leading question, as most survey items are, and so should allow us to identify institutional weaknesses that are most obvious and most in the minds of our students.

Over eight semesters since 1994, 2767 different changes to the campus have been suggested. By far, the greatest number of requests has been for additional courses, sections, and programs (967=35%). Many students simply said: change nothing; I love it the way it is (572=21%). Over the years, a total of 38 (=1%) comments were made about our academic advising. A very few students suggested that our advisors should be more knowledgeable about degree programs at other colleges, that they should be easier to find, and that they should be more helpful, friendly, or assertive about giving students what they need. Only 38 out of 2767 indicates a high level of satisfaction. (full data are posted on the campus web site: <http://www.sc.edu/union/about/IfYouCouldChangeOneThing.htm>)

DISTINGUISHED TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Each spring, we administer a program in which students are invited to nominate their most effective instructor to be named USCU's Distinguished Teacher of the Year. These evaluations and decisions go well beyond the matter of academic advisement, but they certainly include it.

One notable result is that a majority of our faculty receive at least one nomination for this honor:

year	faculty eligible	faculty nominated	per cent
2002	30	19	63%
2003	29	20	69%

Some of the comments made by students in support of their nominations are as follows:

He supports his students any way he can, through school work and through being a friend. He's someone who will listen to your problems and help motivate you to be the best you can be. He makes sure everyone knows what is going on. He takes extra time out to help others even when he's at home.

He is a very prepared person , always on time for class. Cares for his students on or off campus.

She is always here to help anyone with whatever they need.

He is a great teacher, based on his cheerful personality, extreme knowledge of the subject, and willingness to help a student at any time.

He is always willing to help his students—above and beyond the call of duty.

We are pleased that so many of the faculty can have such a strong impact on our students' academic and personal lives.

COURSE EVALUATION RESULTS

Our teaching faculty act as academic advisors, so two of the items on our regular course evaluation form apply to the matter of advisor availability. Below, are the questions (with their original numbering) and the per cent satisfied or very satisfied from a sampling of our course schedule for the spring (n=52 course sections), summer (n=12 sections), and fall (n=25 sections), 2003.

6. The instructor scheduled a reasonable number of office hours per week.
1. Very Dissatisfied 2. Dissatisfied 3. Satisfied 4. Very Satisfied

semester	# responses				% satisfied
	1. VD	2. D	3. S	4. VS	
Sp '03	8	8	224	441	98%
Sum '03	0	0	17	96	100%
F '03	0	2	98	187	99%

7. Please indicate your satisfaction with the availability of the instructor outside the classroom by choosing one response from the scale below. (In selecting your rating, consider the instructor's availability via established office hours, appointments, and other opportunities for face-to-face interaction as well as via telephone, e-mail, fax, and other means.)
1. Very Dissatisfied 2. Dissatisfied 3. Satisfied 4. Very Satisfied

semester	# responses				% satisfied
	1. VD	2. D	3. S	4. VS	
Sp '03	4	5	231	411	99%
Sum '03	0	1	19	92	99%
F '03	3	0	104	170	99%

During fall, 2003, we added the following item to our course evaluation form and administered it in all classes:

Finally, please comment on our academic advising system, its good features and bad, and if you can, on how well USCU prepares its students for transfer to a four-year institution. Have you formed a good relationship with your advisor? Have you gotten the help you have needed?

Not every student made a comment in response to this item, but we received 93 responses. 87% (81/93) were positive comments, mostly a single word or phrase:

yes
great
no problems
helpful
explained every option
knowledgeable
If she doesn't know, she'll research and get back.

Among the 12 negative responses were comments like these:

misinformed—didn't need the course
needs to listen to me better
not knowledgeable
more informative
don't have a chance to talk to him but I have gotten all the help I've needed

Certainly the overwhelming judgment is that our faculty advisors are available and helpful. We do have some individual instances where students have not gotten the information that they need or they have misunderstood the advice provided. Four different students made the "misinformed" comment above, all in our CHEM 101 class. We suspect that these comments, at least, represent confusion or uncertainty over changes in the ADN and BSN at USCS.

ALUMNI SURVEY

During spring 2001 and 2003, a separate alumni survey was distributed to past graduates as a part of the statewide Institutional Effectiveness Program. The survey itself did not deal with academic advisement, but it did conclude with some open-ended questions that allowed these graduates to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of USCU. As can be seen in the table below, a majority commented, without prompting, on the caring attitude of the faculty, their availability to students, and on their involvement and willingness to give time to students. These faculty are our academic advisors. Even those who didn't mention these particular qualities had nothing negative to say and concluded that USCU is a great school.

Year	Surveys Mailed	Surveys Returned	Surveys With Comments	Comments Specifying "friendly, caring, supportive, helpful"	Other Positive Comments, such as "excellent, small, diverse"	Negative Comments
2001	35	9=26%	9=100%	8=89%	1=11%	0
2003	47	14=30%	12=86%	7=58%	5=42%	0

ACADEMIC INTERVENTION

Academic advisors have been involved for some years in a program that we call Academic Intervention. Some time during the first half of each term, faculty give formal feedback to each student about his or her performance in each course, an informal mid-term grade of "S" or "U" and written comments on that

performance and suggestions for improvement, if warranted. Copies of the "unsatisfactory" mid-term reports are distributed to our Opportunity Scholars Program office and to the appropriate academic advisors. In this way, at-risk students are helped and encouraged by at least two different individuals, the instructor and the advisor, and for those enrolled in OSP, by a third individual, an OSP counselor.

In an effort to judge the effectiveness of these efforts, we looked at the eventual performance of a sample of 30 students who received a mid-term grade of "U" in fall, 2003, and recorded the final course grade for the semester. In this sample, all of whom were performing unsatisfactorily at midterm, two earned an "A" in the course, three earned a "B," seven earned a "C," six earned a "D," nine earned an "F," and three withdrew from the course. In all, 30% failed the course, and 70% either withdrew or went on to pass the course. Of the students who stayed in their courses, the average grade earned was "D+."

Use of Assessment Results:

In the transcript analysis described above, none of the sample (n=30) were inappropriately advised to take a course not indicated by the English or math placement tests. 70% of the students eligible to take UNIV 101 did enroll in that course, a high percentage for a course that is not required to be taken. Four students (13%) did enroll in a computer or chemistry course for which they did not have the math prerequisite.

Admissions and Testing has expanded its reporting of information on new students to include not only placement test scores, but also high school exit test scores, SAT scores, high school math background, and other high school information. These data provide a firmer foundation for academic advisement during that first semester. Our math instructor regularly reminds advisors about math prerequisites. Our science faculty are discussing the possibility of instituting a math prerequisite for all chemistry courses, as a weak math background seems to be a common reason for difficulty in chemistry.

Our transcript analyses show that most of our students take speech, math, and computer science, even though all are not required for our associate degrees. Advisors are encouraging students to take courses in these basic, SACS-recognized areas. We have good balance in other liberal-arts areas, too. Only one or two natural science courses are required for the associate degree, but the average taken is 2.1. Between four and six each are taken in the humanities and the social sciences. Information from the CIRP indicates that many of our students come to us with narrow experiences and skills that they themselves perceive as weak. Advisors encourage these students to use course requirements and electives to broaden their views of the world and to strengthen these important life skills.

Based on comments from the spring advisor evaluation, we have urged advisors to post and keep all office hours, to obtain catalogs for area colleges and to be aware of Internet versions of college catalogs, to call colleges to obtain necessary information, and to encourage students in all classes to see their advisors for pre-registration. New catalogs for many area colleges were distributed to advisors this past fall, and a library of catalogs from area colleges is now available to students in the student lounge.

STRUCTURING ADVISEMENT

Over the last few years, we have gradually developed greater structure in our overall advising program. Posters are mounted all over campus, telling students who their advisors are, and we regularly survey students to determine that they do know which faculty or staff member is assigned to each (see above). We have clearly stated mechanisms in place for finding out who a student's advisor is, if he or she does not know, and for changing advisors, if the student would like to do so, for any reason.

For a long time, we held strictly to the policy of assigned advisors and basically forbade an advisor to work with the advisee of another. Recently, we have relaxed this expectation in an effort to make advisement more immediate and accessible. We have referred to the advisement, of a student not the advisor's own, as "shadow advisement." If a student's advisor is not available at the moment, the student can get at least some response and help. We recognize that shadow advisement carries the risk of less-informed advisement and possible error, and we combat that risk by urging the student to follow up with the assigned advisor, in

that particular major, but at least the student has been able to air his or her concerns immediately and to receive some kind of response or counsel.

Another way in which we are increasing the accessibility of our advisors is by using email more. Most advisors publicize their email addresses and encourage students to get in touch with them in that way. Faculty have reported increased usage. This feature of our academic advisement also contributes to computer literacy among our students, one of the basic academic skills emphasized by SACS and one of the skills in which our students have expressed weaknesses.

Many faculty have begun to eat their lunches in their offices and to talk with students over lunch. Faculty attend student get-togethers, parties, meals, and a good bit of informal discussion happens here.

We encourage students to think about career and life goals and about an appropriate, intended major. Our library has career exploration materials, and our Opportunity Scholars Program (OSP) has installed the state's SCOIS career information system. During fall 2003, OSP gave a faculty workshop on SCOIS. USCU, USC, and USCS bulletins are all available in our Admissions office. The bulletins for most other in-state colleges and universities are accessible through the SC Information Highway at <http://www.sciway.net/edu/colleges/alphalist.html>. Bulletins for out of state colleges can be located through this University of Texas site: <http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state/>. One of our faculty members has incorporated career information into his school web site: <http://www.sc.edu/union/Biology/career.htm>.

Our OSP program has become involved in academic advisement in other ways, as well. The director and all the staff help Admissions with incoming students and make specific efforts to help new students get the help they need. They encourage students to obtain a worksheet for their intended program of study before meeting with their advisor and to discuss options if they are uncertain what major to choose. They encourage students to become as independent as possible and to know their own academic route. We find that beginning students are sometimes more comfortable with OSP staff than with faculty members; they approach more readily and open up more. As students gain confidence, they then get more out of both classes and faculty advisors.

A little more specifically, the OSP program has taken over all our nursing advisees, who previously had been assigned to two or three different advisors. This change has given us a single, central location for a popular and somewhat technical, professional program. It has been especially helpful in keeping track of program changes, as the ADN is shifted from USCS to STC.

One of the courses USCU offers is PSYC 103, Psychology of Adjustment. Adjustment to college is one of the major components of the course, and academic advisement is one of the topics that students research within that component.

We have developed an Advisors' Notebook and USCS Change of Campus Guide that lists the specific USCU courses that should be taken in preparation for each USCS baccalaureate degree. This guide specifically shows how any student can earn an associate degree at USCU before changing to USCS. With the transfer of the ADN program from USCS to Spartanburg Tech, nursing students have been somewhat insecure. We have tried to ease this transition by actively seeking out requirement and policy changes and passing this information on to students as soon as we get it. We have organized meetings each semester that allow our nursing students to discuss these matters personally with both USCS and STC representatives.

We have developed a detailed, two-year schedule of classes for both our Union and Laurens sites. Many of our students have demanding family and job responsibilities, and these extended schedules allow them to plan ahead. Semester schedules are posted to the Web as soon as they are developed (eg. http://registrar.sc.edu/html/Course_Listings/Union/200411shortDept.htm), and faculty are developing Web pages that present detailed information on specific courses (see

<http://www.sc.edu/union/facstaff/facstaff.html>). All of these efforts are designed to provide students and advisors with enough information to make sound advisement decisions.

USC has recently produced a new Independent Learning catalog of correspondence courses available from Columbia. This information has been available on-line, but a paper listing can put the information into students' hands immediately, and these courses add significantly to the diversity of offerings on a small campus.

We have increased the availability of advisors during registration week by having all advisors present during the whole week, rather than having selected advisors on duty in rotation. In this way, specialists in specific areas, such as nursing or psychology, are always available.

Often, at risk students will be admitted to USCU with the understanding that they will enroll in specific courses designed to foster success. Intensive sections of ENGL 101 and MATH 111 incorporate additional class time and increased contact with the instructors. THSP 140 teaches public communication, a basic skill for college success, and UNIV 101 teaches study skills, time management, goal setting, and many other success skills. The Student Affairs Committee has the authority to specify the courses in which an at-risk student may enroll, and any such limitations will be included in the letter of acceptance.

As described above, academic advisors try to help at-risk by participation in an academic intervention program. Students who are performing unsatisfactorily at midterm are helped and encouraged by their instructors, but the students' advisors are informed, as well. Advisors then call or speak to these students and offer additional help and advice. During fall 2003, we had a 70% success rate.